

September 7, 2016

Dear Committee Members of House Local Government,

I support SB 239 and request that you vote YES to prohibit a local unit of government from enacting an ordinance or rule that regulates a dog based solely on breed.



As Director of Detroit Animal Care and Control, a public safety official and certified canine behavior consultant, I firmly believe all citizens deserve protection from dangerous animals. I also believe communities have a duty to enact ordinances and legislation that promote the health and safety of its citizens using scientifically sound, enforceable and cost-effective policy.

As found in countless communities and across the 20 states that have already passed a state law to prohibit breed-specific legislation, the most effective way to reduce dog bites is enacting responsible ownership laws and community bite prevention programs. These programs focus on key indicators of bite risk: resident dogs, proper confinement and control of dogs, and community efforts to provide information and resources to promote responsible pet ownership.

Resident Dogs vs Family Dogs

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) 2001 Joint Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interactions, the primary indicator of risk regarding dog-human bite incidents is whether the dog is a "resident dog" or a "family dog." Resident dogs are dogs maintained outside the home or obtained for negative functions like guarding, fighting, protection or breeding for financial gain. They are removed from human socialization and are unlikely to exhibit the same social behaviors and signaling as dogs kept as pets. Family dogs live inside the home and are afforded opportunity to learn appropriate behaviors through daily positive interaction with people. They also benefit from regular veterinary care, training, regular exercise and regular feeding schedules.

Proper Confinement and Control

Leash laws and laws that identify proper confinement are effective in that they limit unsupervised human-canine interaction. Laws against animals kept perpetually restrained or tethered outside identify irresponsible owners who are not providing socialization and proper daily care of their animals. Licensing and permanent identification of owned animals, such as microchipping, assist in reuniting loose, owned dogs with their owners, as well as identifying irresponsible owners who let their dogs repeatedly run at large.

Community Outreach, Education and Resources

Community programs that assist in educating the public on bite risk factors focus on homes with resident dogs and dogs being left alone unsupervised with children and senior citizens. Organizations that assist in community outreach are integral in providing the public with this information and resources to keep their dog healthy, socialized and trained, all of which are important factors in reducing dog bites.

By implementing only a portion of these strategies in Detroit, we have reduced dog bites by over 28% in 2016 alone.

Banning Breeds

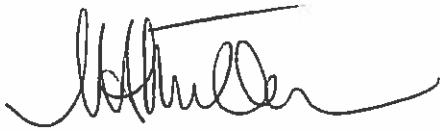
Overwhelmingly ineffective public safety models are laws that target a particular breed. Most breed identification is done through visual identification by the victim or responding officer. A study by the AVMA in 2009 compared the accuracy of canine DNA analysis versus visual breed identification by veterinarians and shelter professionals. The study results showed that 87.5% of the dogs were identified incorrectly by animal experts. In fact, visual breed identification has proven so unreliable that the Centers for Disease Control stopped using breed designation in data collection.

Professional organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control, American Bar Association and National Animal Care and Control Association, all agree that legislation aimed to reduce dog bites based on breed is ineffective as a public safety measure. The National Animal Care and Control Association Guidelines on Dangerous/Vicious Animals reads, "Dangerous and/or vicious animals should be labeled as such as a result of their actions or behavior and not because of their breed. Any animal may exhibit aggressive behavior regardless of breed. Accurately identifying a specific animal's lineage for prosecution purposes may be extremely difficult. Additionally, breed specific legislation may create an undue burden to owners who otherwise have demonstrated proper pet management and responsibility."

In addition to this, breed specific legislation raises concerns regarding inequity of response based on faulty perceived threat, which is based on appearance instead of the behavior of an animal. Laws that identify aggressive and dangerous behavior in a clinical manner that can be applied to all dogs regardless of breed remove bias and more accurately assess risk.

I humbly ask you to vote in support of SB 239 to ensure all Michiganders are protected equally.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Miller', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Melissa A. Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA
Director of Detroit Animal Care and Control
Certified Behavior Consultant Canine
Certified Professional Dog Trainer